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Images of Youth Deviance in the Irish Republic: The Case of the Bugsy Malones

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Summary: Youth deviance, namely any appearance, attitude or behaviour which is considered outside the boundaries of acceptable social norms and is associated with youth as either a life stage or a state of mind, is a challenging phenomenon to capture. This article argues that in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon, a triangulated approach, capturing pop cultural, policy and personalistic images, is required. This approach is applied to the case of the Bugsy Malones, a delinquent youth subculture that emerged in 1970s Dublin. Drawing on archival and interview data, this article first examines the sensationalised press rhetoric that surrounded the subculture and the deeper symbolism it invoked on a societal level. It then delineates the intersection of moralistic, psychogenic, sociological and state security policy images in response to the subculture. The third section employs personalistic imagery (which places the individual at the heart of the analysis and sheds light on their motivations, emotions and beliefs) to generate an enhanced understanding of the Bugsy Malones. The final section considers resurgences and reverberations surrounding youth deviance over time, particularly in relation to a so-called Bugsy Malone 'copycat' gang, which allegedly surfaced in June 2001. The article concludes by reflecting on the value of a combined cultural-historical criminology approach to the study of youth deviance.
Keywords: Cultural criminology, historical criminology, Ireland, Bugsy Malones, Loughan House, youth subculture, youth deviance.

Introduction

The subfield of cultural criminology, which first emerged with the publication of its inaugural text by Ferrell and Sanders (1995), regards crime as a 'creative human construct' and considers culture a 'site of struggle' between resistance and control (Bevier, 2015, p. 34). Cultural criminology emphasises the socially constructed nature of deviance and is sensitive to the diverse and often contested meanings that surround this phenomenon. Valuable insights into youth deviance, namely any appearance, attitude or behaviour which is

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considered outside the boundaries of acceptable social norms and is associated with youth as either a life stage or a state of mind, can be usefully extracted from a cultural criminology approach. Ferrell's (1995) study of youthful graffiti writers in Denver, Colorado, for instance, highlights the nuanced meanings that emerge when the lived experiences of these writers intersect with legal and political authorities. His study emphasises the context-specific nature of deviance and the importance of capturing a multi-perspectival approach in the study of same.

Inspired by Ferrell's approach, this article similarly adopts a cultural criminology approach to a delinquent youth subculture that emerged in 1970s Dublin, namely the Bugsy Malones.[1] A limited literature has surrounded the Bugsy Malones to date. They are ambiguously alluded to in Ferriter's (2012, p. 396) study of 1970s Ireland, are mentioned in Williams's (2020, pp 25–7) biography of Gerry 'The Monk' Hutch and are briefly discussed in memoirs by McVerry (2003) and Lonergan (2010). Apart from these works and the popular social history blog *Come Here to Me* (Fallon, 2017), the Bugsy Malones have been largely overlooked.

Cultural criminology often positions 'the subculture as the basic unit of criminological analysis' and considers the interplay between subcultural identity and the wider social, political and media constructions that surround it (Ferrell, 1999, p. 403). In order to examine this interplay in relation to the Bugsy Malones, this article adopts a triangulated approach, capturing pop cultural, policy and personalistic images. Pop cultural imagery captures the representations of a phenomenon in newspaper articles, plays, documentaries and other forms of media. Policy images capture how political élites understand issues at stake and shape the manner by which solutions are formulated and resources are allocated. Personalistic images place the individual at the heart of the analysis and shed light on their motivations, emotions and beliefs. In line with cultural criminology, this triangulated approach facilitates analysis of representations of the Bugsy Malones from various perspectives and allows the layers of meaning surrounding the subculture to be accessed.

The article proceeds as follows. Section I ('Pop cultural images') examines the sensationalised rhetoric that surrounded the Bugsy Malones, focusing particularly on press representations of a Spanish holiday, financed by the proceeds of crime, upon which the subculture supposedly embarked. The

1 It is worth noting that the term 'subculture' is a contested one that has sparked extensive debate; see Blackman (2005). For the purposes of this article, Hodkinson's (2002, p. 360) definition of subculture as 'translocal cultural groups of substance' characterised by high levels of identity, commitment, consistent distinctiveness and autonomy is used.

section also examines the deeper subcultural symbolism invoked by the Bugsy Malones. Section II ('Policy images') analyses the intersection of sociological, psychogenic, moralistic and state security policy images in relation to the Bugsy Malone episode. While elements of all four policy images were evident, the backdrop of the Troubles foregrounded a state security image and engendered the opening of a detention centre called Loughan House in response to the subculture.

Drawing mainly on semi-structured interviews conducted with inner-city residents, priests, politicians and criminal justice practitioners, Section III ('Personalistic images') sheds light on the background and nature of the subculture. Such a perspective, it is argued, humanises the Bugsy Malones and adds a deeper layer of meaning to their story. Section IV ('Temporal dimensions') widens its temporal lens to examine the emergence of a so-called Bugsy Malone copycat gang in June 2001. It also discusses the recurrent nature of institutionalised responses to youth deviance in an Irish context, which indicates continuity rather than change in terms of criminal justice policy. The article concludes by discussing the value of a combined cultural-historical criminology approach to the study of youth deviance.

Section I – Pop cultural images

The term 'Bugsy Malone' came from a 1976 spoof gangster film directed by Alan Parker, which featured a cast of child actors and was loosely based on the careers of Al Capone and Bugs Moran. It was screened in Irish cinemas in December 1976 (*Evening Herald*, 1976, p. 7), and soon afterwards, on 20 January 1977, *Evening Herald* journalist Liam Ryan reported that a Bugsy Malone gang was operating in Dublin. The gang had allegedly carried out a jump-over (a robbery) of a branch of the Northern Bank, in which £1,400 was stolen (*Evening Herald*, 20 January 1977, p. 1). Mafioso discourse was commonly used by the *Herald* and other newspapers in relation to the Bugsy Malones. For instance, members of the subculture were described as 'junior Al Capones' (*Evening Herald*, 26 April 1978, p. 8) while the 13-year-old leader of the gang was alluded to as 'the Godfather' (*Sunday Independent*, 23 January 1977, p. 8).

As this Mafioso discourse suggests, sensationalism was a staple of press coverage surrounding the Bugsy Malones. This sensationalism is best illustrated with reference to a supposed Spanish holiday undertaken by members of the subculture. On 4 September 1978, Liam Ryan reported in the *Irish Independent*:

> The black market is paying off so well for the 'Bugsy Malone' offenders that 12 of them were recently seen by Gardaí boarding a plane at Dublin Airport bound for a Mediterranean holiday resort.

The implication of Ryan's article was that members of the subculture were using the proceeds of their criminal activities to finance a holiday to Benidorm in Spain. He outlined how these 'Bugsy Malone criminals' who occupied the 'Dublin terror ghetto of Seán McDermott Street' were 'not beyond publicly boasting of their life of crime and violence' (*Irish Independent*, 4 September 1978, p. 1), thereby constructing the subculture as enemies of law and order. While such sensationalist rhetoric was shared by other contemporary newspapers – an article on the front page of the *Evening Press* on 4 September 1978 announced, 'Larceny charge kids on Spanish holiday' – Ryan's framing of the episode was nevertheless intended to 'inflame newspaper readers against the children of the Seán McDermott Street–Summerhill area' (*Magill*, October 1978, vol. 2, no. 5, p. 5). Given that a return fare from Dublin to Malaga with Iberia Airlines in August 1978 cost approximately £116 per person (*Sunday Independent*, 19 March 1978, p. 16; €636 in today's money), journalists knew that this episode would incense readers who may not have been able to afford such a journey.

One of the few mediums to debunk the journalistic myth-making surrounding the episode was *Magill*. Journalist J.J. Molloy criticised the headlines surrounding the alleged Bugsy Malone Spanish holiday as 'the most disgraceful outburst of journalistic gutter-snipery seen in Dublin for some time'. Molloy outlined the facts for his readers. The holiday had been organised by various adults in the inner-city area, including a local publican and a priest, and parents had subsidised the cost. In total, 19 people from the Seán McDermott Street–Summerhill area travelled to Benidorm; just five of these were aged under 17, and two of these five did not have a criminal record. This meant that only three actual members of the Bugsy Malone gang were on the trip (*Magill*, October 1978, vol. 2, no. 5, pp 4–5). It was therefore not an excursion organised by the Bugsy Malone gang on the proceeds of their criminal activities; rather, it was a locally organised holiday for a handful of inner-city kids, under the supervision of responsible adults. Although these three Bugsy Malones reportedly sent postcards to gardaí and District Justice Eileen Kennedy boasting of their Spanish holiday (*Irish Times*, 29 May 1985, p. 6; *Irish Press*, 8 January 1992, p. 12; Farrelly, 1989, p. 120; Williams, 2020, p. 26), which verifies their cavalier attitude towards law and order, or simply

showcases the famous north Dublin wit, Ryan's coverage of this episode was premised on sensationalism and thus was neither objective nor particularly well-informed.

Underneath this sensationalist rhetoric, however, lay a deeper societal fear symbolised by the Bugsy Malones, namely the fear of ghettofication. Whereas gentrification refers to the arrival of more affluent citizens into an impoverished urban area, which changes the character of the neighbourhood, its antonym, ghettofication, refers to the arrival of individuals from a deprived part of the urban district to a more affluent one, which devalues property prices (Atkinson and Bridge, 2005). In the case of the Bugsy Malones, ghettofication captured the symbolic incursion of the subculture to the (middle-class) heart of Dublin, O'Connell Street.

As mentioned above, the first reference to the Bugsy Malone gang in Dublin was in the *Evening Herald* on 20 January 1977, which described a jump-over in the Northern Bank, located on O'Connell Street. O'Connell Street represented the commercial and tourist heart of the city, and the subculture's infiltration of this thoroughfare catapulted its members to a national spotlight (or certainly to the front pages of the *Herald*). While the physical presence on O'Connell Street of inhabitants of the north inner city was nothing new, the Bugsy Malones also symbolised the incursion of a seemingly brazen (if youthful) criminality. As journalist Gene Kerrigan scathingly wrote, this concern over juvenile crime was based

> … on the fear that the little buggers are coming out of the ghettos to rip apart the fragile fabric of civilised society. Somehow the problem wasn't so pressing before it spilled onto O'Connell Street.
>
> (*Magill*, October 1977, vol. 1, no. 1, p. 17)

This fear of ghettofication was one of the deeper symbolic concerns sparked by the Bugsy Malone episode.

Section II – Policy images

There were four main policy images which shaped political responses to the Bugsy Malone episode, namely moralistic, psychogenic, sociological and state security. Moralistic images regarded crime as a sin and regarded religion as the main solution to deviance. In accordance with this image, local priests of Seán McDermott Street parish were amongst the supporters of custodial care

for young offenders such as the Bugsy Malones. On 17 May 1977, Fathers Morgan Costelloe, Gerard McGuire, Paul Lavelle and Peter McVerry sent an open letter to Taoiseach Liam Cosgrave, highlighting 'the breakdown of law and order in this area in relation to young offenders under sixteen years of age'. They emphasised the 'uncontrollable lawlessness' of these young people who 'rob, terrorise and destroy property with complete disregard for human life', and called for 'immediate emergency legislation introducing enlightened custodial care' (An Open Letter to the Taoiseach, Mr Liam Cosgrave, 17 May 1977). The emphasis on 'enlightened' care is noteworthy and indicates that imprisonment cannot be construed purely as a punitive measure. Cosgrave promised the priests that 'the Government are prepared to take whatever steps are necessary to safeguard members of the public' (Letter from Liam Cosgrave to Father Costelloe, 10 June 1977). On 26 August, Fr Costelloe sent a follow-up letter to Taoiseach Jack Lynch, warning that the problem of young offenders seemed 'to be out of control again' (Letter from Morgan Costelloe to the Taoiseach, 26 August 1977). No written response to Costelloe, however, appears in the Department of the Taoiseach files in the National Archives of Ireland (NAI). A comprehensive analysis of the impact of the moralistic image on the Bugsy Malone episode is inhibited by this dearth of surviving archival material.

Similar to the moralistic image, the psychogenic image also fed into discourses surrounding the Bugsy Malone episode. Psychogenic imagery outlined that deviance was caused by mental or emotional disturbance and psychological or psychiatric treatment was required to remedy it. The Royal College of Psychiatry (child section) and the Psychological Society of Ireland were among the organisations that campaigned against the opening of Loughan House (a place of detention established in response to the sub-culture; *Irish Times*, 2 May 1978, p. 1). The National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) claimed that while Loughan House was not suitable for those with 'normal personalities' who became involved in crime, it did support use of the institution for the 'aggressive sociopath' who was 'severely disturbed' (NYCI, 19 April 1978 – Statement on Loughan House). A meeting was held on 11 May 1978 between Department of Justice officials and the representatives of six organisations opposed to Loughan House. At the meeting, Principal Officer of the Department of Justice Risteard MacConchradha gave assurances that Loughan House was intended for 'sociopathically disturbed boys' (Group Consisting of Persons Presiding over Various Organisations, p. 2). Minister for Justice Gerry Collins similarly confirmed that the institution was intended for

'behaviourally difficult boys' (Letter from Gerry Collins to Taoiseach Jack Lynch, 19 April 1978), and pledged to ensure that psychological and psychiatric services would be made available to detainees (Group Consisting of Persons Presiding over Various Organisations, p. 8). This demonstrates the impact of psychogenic imagery in shaping the discourse surrounding Loughan House and highlights the role of élites and interest groups in the construction of deviance.

Sociological policy images were embraced by the Campaign for the Care of Deprived Children (CARE), an interest group established in 1970 to campaign for improved childcare services (Sargent, 2014, p. 29). These images identified a dysfunctional family environment or structural factors such as inadequate housing as the origins of deviant behaviour. On 28 February 1978, CARE published a 40-page booklet entitled *Who Wants a Children's Prison in Ireland?* The booklet criticised the staffing of Loughan House by prison officers and its unsuitable location in the remote environs of Blacklion, Co. Cavan. It suggested alternatives to Loughan House that accorded with the sociological image, including the provision of hostels for deprived youths, the extension of neighbourhood youth projects and the establishment of day attendance centres (CARE, 1978; *Irish Press*, 1 March 1978, p. 7). According to social worker and member of CARE, Niav O'Daly (1979, p. 484), Loughan House represented a backlash to the sociological image and pandered to a 'hysterical chorus', which called for 'troublesome children' to be locked up. It is worth noting that members of CARE had a vested interest in espousing a sociological image of youth deviance. As O'Sullivan (1979, p. 225) has argued, through 'moral exhortations concerning child care provisions', such organisations seek to 'extend […] employment opportunities' for their members.

CARE availed of international experts such as Dr Masud Hoghughi to cast aspersions on Loughan House. Hoghughi was Principal of Aycliffe School, an assessment and treatment centre for 'severely disordered youngsters', located in northeast England. Although Aycliffe was a residential institution, its approach to young offenders resonated with a sociological image, which regarded delinquency as a product of environmental factors (Hoghughi, 1979, p. 384). On 25 February 1978, CARE organised a seminar (chaired by President of the High Court Mr Justice Finlay) in which Hoghughi delivered a talk on 'Secure Accommodation and Disordered Youngsters'. A Thames TV film about Aycliffe was also shown to the seminar attendees (CARE Seminar, 25 February 1978). Hoghughi was interviewed on *The Late Late Show* later that evening, which generated further public awareness surrounding his holistic approach to young offenders. The Department expressed concern

that Hoghughi was 'helping to discredit the Loughan House project' and evinced alarm at a suggestion made by Hoghughi to a Principal Officer of the Department that 'he (the Principal [Officer]) could create difficulties, go slow and thus frustrate the [Loughan House] project' (Memorandum for the Government, 11 April 1978, p. 8). Hoghughi, however, was perhaps easy to dismiss as a foreign doctor, and may not have been particularly effective in promoting the sociological policy image.

The entrenchment of the state security image within the Department further inhibited the receptiveness of policymakers towards sociological policy images. The state security image emerged in response to the threat of paramilitary violence during the Troubles and led to a suspicious and secretive mindset on the part of the Department of Justice. It meant that 'crisis management' characterised policymaking within the Department during the 1970s. According to Rogan (2011, p. 147), 'the Department of Justice was forced to act reactively to the unfolding, volatile events, and furthermore to do so in a state of uncertainty and some fear'. Similar crisis policymaking applied to the opening of Loughan House. Following the victory of Fianna Fáil in the June 1977 general election, Taoiseach Jack Lynch established a project team in September 1977 to consider the recommendations of the Henchy and Task Force Reports (published in 1974 and 1975 respectively, and which advocated establishing a place of detention for young offenders aged under sixteen; Sargent, 2014). Risteard MacConchradha, a Principal Officer in the Department of Justice, was appointed to the project team on 12 October 1977. MacConchradha informed the team that Minister for Justice Gerry Collins and Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Education James Tunney wanted the issue addressed with the 'utmost urgency' and a decision would have to be made within a fortnight (Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse, 2009, para. 350).

Nick (a senior politician during the 1970s, interviewed as part of the author's research on the Bugsy Malones; see Section III) attributed this urgency to Eileen Kennedy, Justice of the Metropolitan Children's Court, who had informed the Department of Justice that 'the number of juvenile criminals appearing on charges had soared' compared to previous years. He claimed that the courts placed pressure on the Department to 'alleviate the problem as quickly as possible', but this overlooks the fact that a deficit had existed in the youth justice system since 1973 with the closure of St Conleth's Reformatory. It was during the sixth meeting, on 2 November 1977, that MacConchradha suggested Loughan House as a place of detention for young offenders. He provided no explanation for his suggestion (Commission to

Inquire into Child Abuse, 2009, paras 353–4), and it seemed a particularly unsuitable location given its distance from Dublin (approximately 174km) and lack of public transportation links (which made it difficult for family members to visit detainees). Crisis policymaking may have been understandable given the backdrop of the Troubles, but it did not lend itself to thoughtful or evidence-based policy responses.

Section III – Personalistic images

The ideal method of gathering personalistic imagery is through interviews with members of the deviant and/or marginalised population under study. Unfortunately, few members of the Bugsy Malones have survived, which renders it difficult to capture their lived experiences (*Sunday World*, 29 June 1997, p. 5; Williams, 2020, p. 63; *Irish Times*, 2 September 1987, p. 8). As a result, an alternative approach to personalistic imagery was adopted whereby proximate voices were captured. This involved interviewing individuals who had encountered the Bugsy Malones during the 1970s on a personal or professional basis. Between April 2019 and September 2021, n=10 participants were interviewed, comprising criminal justice practitioners, youth workers, journalists, priests, politicians and local residents of Dublin's north inner city. Snowball sampling was used to identify and recruit participants, and all were anonymised for ethical reasons. The insights provided by these proximate voices, in addition to the methodological issues in capturing same, have been addressed in a separate work (Molloy, forthcoming). For the purposes of this article, two themes which emerged from the interview data will be explored, namely gender and the phenomenology of crime. These will be discussed in turn.

Gender

Bearing in mind the fluidity of gender identities, norms traditionally designated as 'masculine', such as violence and toughness, have often been used to explain gang behaviour (Davies, 1998). Interview participants similarly aligned the criminality of the Bugsy Malones with a performance of masculinity. For instance, Gareth, an inner-city priest, described how he had a 'run-in' with one of the Bugsy Malones 'over an admission to a youth club'. When the youth was denied entry to the club, he 'broke a bottle, and he put it up to me'. Gareth, however, 'was absolutely certain this was just macho and they weren't going to [use it]'. Gareth's assertion that he was not afraid when

faced with a youth dangerously brandishing a broken bottle – 'I had no fear at all' – may have been an attempt to convey his own 'masculine' attributes such as courage in the face of danger. Nevertheless, he believed that the threat of violence displayed by the Bugsy Malone was merely a macho display of toughness that lacked any intent of follow-through.

Similarly, Larry, an employee of Loughan House, recalled instances where the Bugsy Malones fought violently against staff members who were trying to enforce curfews. According to Larry, 'they said you know we have to fight when the staff go to remove us. 'Cause if we don't fight, well, we lose street cred'. This signalled the Bugsy Malones' desire to gain respect and status among their peers through displays of physical aggression, and it aligns with King and Swain's (2022) research on 'street masculinity', which is partially characterised by a preparedness for violence at all times. Furthermore, Jack, a youth worker in inner-city Dublin during the 1970s, recalled that among the Bugsy Malones and their peers it was considered

> '… acceptable to grow up in the community and to go to your Clonmels [St Joseph's Industrial School, Ferryhouse], to go to your St Patrick's Institution, to go to Mountjoy, it was a progression, and it was seen as a macho.'

This graduation from one place of detention to another signals the role of masculine norms in shaping the actions of the Bugsy Malones.

Their performance of masculine norms such as violence and toughness extended to a negativistic view of women, who were regarded as either targets of crime or sex objects. Regarding the former, the Bugsy Malones developed a handbag-snatching scheme at the junction of Summerhill and Gardiner Street whereby when cars stopped at the traffic lights, a Bugsy Malone would smash the passenger window to grab any handbag inside (Nick; see also McVerry, 2003, p. 15). Handbag snatching was a distinctly gendered crime, with lone female drivers pinpointed by the Bugsy Malones as vulnerable and therefore easy targets (Larry). Regarding the latter, Larry described the Bugsy Malones' attitude to women: 'Respect like for recognition of the role of women? Brutal. Saw women as nothing more than sex – have sex with. A terrible attitude about women' (Larry). It should be emphasised that this was a third-party interpretation of the Bugsy Malones, and if their own voices were captured, a different perspective could emerge. Nevertheless, Larry's recollections connote a form of hegemonic masculinity among the Bugsy Malones that relegated women to a subordinate role (Connell, 2005).

Phenomenology of crime

Cultural criminologists such as Ferrell (1999) have emphasised the importance of examining emotions such as exhilaration, fear and excitement that shape subcultural participation (see also Hayward and Young, 2004). Similarly, Hector, a youth worker, described how the Bugsy Malones' handbag snatching and jump-overs were viewed as 'exciting and fun for as long as they weren't going to get caught'. Max, an inner-city priest, resided near the flats where several Bugsy Malones lived. He described how 'halfway through the night, you'd hear all this racket […] there were the kids up on the roof throwing slates off at the cars going by. Dangerous stuff'. Their desire for excitement and risk-taking extended to an attitude of recklessness towards the welfare of others.

According to Gareth, the Bugsy Malones engaged in joyriding, and would often 'pass out a Garda car and they would beep the horn just to get a chase', which indicates their pursuit of thrills. Gareth further commented that 'having a car and driving fast is, was and is, a status symbol in society […] these kids could never own a car […] in a month of Sundays. So they took to robbing cars'. In this way, Gareth invoked an illegitimate opportunity structure whereby the Bugsy Malones embraced the culturally approved goals of society but pursued illegitimate means of obtaining them (Cloward and Ohlin, 1960). From this perspective, it was not merely the internal characteristics of the Bugsy Malones but also their external social environment that lent itself to risk-taking behaviours (Lyng, 1990).

Youth workers tried to replace the excitement and thrill the Bugsy Malones derived from criminality with more acceptable pursuits. Hector described how as part of local neighbourhood youth projects, young people were brought horse-riding as a fun and diversionary activity. It did not go exactly according to plan, though. Hector recalled:

> '… we were supposed to go horse-riding for an hour, it took around four hours, we just galloped off on all the mountains, we couldn't stop the horses.'

Analogous to Hector, Shane (an employee of Trinity House, which opened in 1983 and replaced Loughan House) described how physical recreation in the gym was used to give the Bugsy Malones 'a buzz' and replace their criminal pursuits with more constructive activities. It is worth noting that the above-

mentioned emotions such as excitement and thrill are 'masculinised' in participant accounts (Naegler and Salman, 2016). While such emotions may also be present within female subcultures, the male-dominated composition of the Bugsy Malones renders such analysis beyond the bounds of this article.

Section IV – Temporal dimensions

While the original subculture appeared to have dissipated by the early 1980s, the term 'Bugsy Malone' continued to be used by the press in relation to various instances of youth deviance. An article in the *Evening Herald* in August 1983 (p. 9) described how 'up to twenty female "Bugsy Malones" are at large in the Dublin area and although convicted of various crimes, the courts are powerless to impose sentence on them'. In 1985, a group of young people who carried off a 'daring night time raid' on McCambridge's Warehouse in Bowling Green in Co. Galway and stole 'minerals, sweets and crisps' were described as 'apprentice Bugsy Malones' (*City Tribune*, 4 October 1978, p. 1). In 1997, in Co. Kerry, two youths aged 12 and 14 who were operating a financial scam on the elderly were described as 'Bugsy Malone' criminals (*Kerryman*, 18 July 1977, p. 15). The above examples indicate how the term 'Bugsy Malone' became broadly applied by the press to refer to a variety of forms of youth deviance across gender, geographic and temporal boundaries.

In June 2001, a number of robberies carried out in Dublin city centre by a group of young people led the *Evening Herald* (23 June 2001, p. 6) to assert that a Bugsy Malone copycat gang was in operation. According to journalist Michael Mulqueen, these 'teenagers tearaways [sic] from the north city have carried out several "spectacular" crimes copying the Bugsy gang which terrorised Dublin in the 1980s', namely 'heists' on the Planet Gold Jewellery Shop and Eircell phone shop in the city centre. They copied tactics such as 'walking the rooftops of city streets in search of a lucrative target' (ostensibly a reference to the handbag-snatching scheme of the original Bugsy Malones; *Evening Herald*, 23 June 2001, p. 6). Mulqueen wrote in a follow-up article that these youths were 'mimicking the antics of the legendary gang, the Bugsy Malones' (*Evening Herald*, 6 July 2002, p. 22), conveniently overlooking the fact that the main reason why the Bugsy Malone gang had become 'legendary' during the late 1970s was the antics of newspapers such as the *Evening Herald*.

The summer 2001 episode was not a verifiable case of copycat crime. There are seven indicators of same, namely time order and time proximity, theme

consistency, scene specificity, repetitive viewing, self-editing, offender statements, and second-party statements (Surette, 2016). At best, Mulqueen's articles contain one of these indicators, namely second-party statements – he cited a senior Garda officer who commented that 'we haven't seen this sort of crime since the 70s or the 80s during the days of the Bugsy Malones' (*Evening Herald*, 23 June 2001, p. 6). This ambiguous comment, however, did not clearly confirm the existence of a second wave of the subculture. It seems that the claim of a revivalist Bugsy Malone subculture was largely an invention of the *Evening Herald*. Moreover, sensationalist and playful rhetoric was used to describe the group. For instance, Mulqueen described how a 'dirty half dozen are the ringleaders of the outfit' (*Evening Herald*, 23 June 2001, p. 6), which mirrored discourses used in 1970s press coverage. Although copycat Bugsy Malones did not exist, copycat journalism did. Indeed, as recently as January 2020, a group of youths who assaulted two 13-year-olds in Lucan, Co. Dublin, were alluded to by a Sinn Féin councillor as a bunch of 'Bugsy Malone wannabe[s]' (O'Callaghan, 2020). This continued usage of the Bugsy Malone term indicates the recurrent (and repetitive) nature of media coverage surrounding deviant youths.

In similar fashion, institutionalised responses to youth deviance have also proven recurrent in an Irish context. For instance, in March 1985, Minister for Justice Michael Noonan announced that Spike Island in Co. Cork would be converted to a prison in response to the activities of young joyriders. Ó Cadhla has argued that the opening of the prison was the product of a 'moral panic in the media' (Ó Cadhla, 2001, p. 93), and likewise Jesuit priest Fr Peter McVerry (1985, p. 42) described the Minister's decision as 'being much more influenced by the *Evening Herald* than by considered reflection'.

Such institutional responses to deviance have a long lineage. Coercive confinement alludes to a network of institutions, including Magdalene Laundries, mother and baby homes, psychiatric institutions, and industrial and reformatory schools, which were used extensively in twentieth-century Ireland to control deviant populations. At the peak of coercive confinement in the 1950s, the rate was approximately 1,000 per 100,000 population (far in excess of the current rate of imprisonment in the United States, for instance, which was 629 per 100,000 as of October 2021, according to the World Prison Brief (2021)). Even though, on a surface level, these institutions sometimes appeared welfarist in principle, they were experienced as coercive by the individuals detained in them (O'Sullivan and O'Donnell, 2012). O'Donnell and O'Sullivan (2020) have argued that direct provision centres (places of accommodation

for asylum seekers awaiting the processing of their international protection applications) represent a new form of coercive confinement. The authors note:

> It is difficult to imagine that spending years with strangers in a rural location, unwelcomed in some cases by the locals, prohibited, until very recently […] from seeking employment, with a paltry weekly allowance, a poor diet and a lack of amenities, feels anything but coercive.
>
> (O'Donnell and O'Sullivan, 2020, p. 12)

This demonstrates the continuation of a long trajectory embracing institutional responses to perceived social problems.

The use of institutional responses to deviant and/or marginalised populations is a convenient political solution, which negates addressing deeper structural and socio-economic inequalities. An Irish Penal Reform Trust (2012, p. 1) position paper articulated that 'investing in communities and preventing the marginalisation associated with offending behaviour would have greater positive effects in reducing offending, as well as producing wider social benefits, than imprisonment'. Despite this, a continued recourse to institutionalisation persists in Ireland, which indicates continuity rather than change in policy terms.

Conclusion

It is worth briefly reflecting on the value of a combined cultural-historical criminology approach to the study of youth deviance. Ferrell (2013, p. 261) has written that cultural criminology is composed of various 'theatres of meaning', namely subcultures, subjective experiences and media/pop cultural perspectives. It seeks to capture not merely meaning within each theatre, but also the layers of meanings across these theatres. Similarly, this article has adopted a multi-perspectival approach to the case of the Bugsy Malones to enhance understanding of the myriad representations of the subculture over time.

Pop cultural imagery has contributed insight into the powerful ability of the press both to distort and to challenge the 'facts' surrounding an episode such as the Bugsy Malones' supposed Spanish holiday in 1978. It has also emphasised that pop culture can function as a lens through which the *Zeitgeist* of a society at a particular point in time can be examined. Policy imagery has demonstrated the competing policy images which underpinned political

decision-making during the 1970s, and the indirect ripple effects of the Troubles on the Irish youth justice landscape. Personalistic imagery has delineated the value that accrues by placing the individual at the heart of the lens through which crime and deviance are analysed. The proximate voices captured by this research have shed additional light on the perceived nature and motivations of the Bugsy Malones.

While pop cultural, policy and personalistic imagery portray the Bugsy Malone subculture from different methodological and conceptual perspectives, their underlying power dynamics serve as a unifying factor. Whether depicting clashes between the *Evening Herald* and *Magill*, competing policy images, or physical confrontations between the Bugsy Malones and inner-city priests, these images all position culture 'as arena: the symbolic space in which constructed meanings compete for the power of legitimacy' (Bevier, 2015, p. 38). A cultural criminology approach therefore highlights the need to look beyond surface-level appearances to unearth the deeper tensions and contradictions evoked by criminal justice episodes.

In addition to demonstrating the value of a cultural criminology approach to youth deviance, this article has incorporated a historical criminology approach. Churchill *et al.* (2022, p. 6) have emphasised that historical criminology is not a 'niche sub-field', but rather is 'one of a handful of basic approaches to scholarship on crime and related matters' that can be incorporated as part of various research topics. A historical criminology approach helps to shed light on contemporary criminal justice arrangements, highlights the 'emotional and ethical issues' raised by the study of crime and punishment in the past (Channing, 2022, p. 5), and facilitates a more nuanced exploration of change and continuity on both macro and micro levels (Lawrence, 2019). This article adopted a historical approach in methodological terms, by drawing on archival research, and also in chronological terms, by examining a youth subculture that emerged in the 1970s.

The foregrounding of temporality is central to historical criminology and, accordingly, Section IV expanded its temporal lens to draw resonances between the incarceration of the Bugsy Malones and institutionalised responses to other marginalised populations such as asylum seekers in the present day. This insight challenges the assumption of presentism that often underpins criminological research, namely the 'tendency to position the present as both unique and uniquely problematic' (Yeomans, 2019, p. 457). The current problems Ireland faces in dealing with deviant and/or marginalised populations are not unprecedented, but rather have a long (and rather

unimaginative) lineage. Historical case studies such as the Bugsy Malones are therefore not merely a matter of antiquarian interest. Rather, they enable the development of a 'three-dimensional criminology' that incorporates historical context, and social structure, as well as personal biography (Yeomans, 2019).

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